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BUILDING STADIUMS, BUILDING BRIDGES: GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY IN CHINA

TIMOTHY KELLISON · ALICIA CINTRON



For 60 years, the People's Republic of China has championed the practice of so-called *stadium diplomacy*, in which the cost to construct or renovate a sports stadium in an emerging nation-state is subsidized wholly or in large part by a sponsoring state (Will, 2011, 2012). To date, China has provided support for more than 85 indoor and outdoor stadiums across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the South Pacific (Information Office of the State Council, 2011). These facilities range in size (from a 1,000-seat recreational complex in the Cook Islands to 60,000-seat stadia in Kenya and Senegal) and scope (from serving citizens and holding local matches to hosting major

international events such as the Cricket World Cup and Africa Cup of Nations). Despite variations in function, each stadium is meant to symbolize unity between its state and China. For example, separate venues in Gabon and Benin are each named Stade de l'Amitié (Friendship Stadium; Ross, 2014). Additionally, at Mozambique's Estádio Nacional do Zimpeto, a plaque declares, "The friendship between China and Mozambique will last forever like the heavens and the earth" (Ross, 2014, para. 10).

China's stadium diplomacy represents a small part—less than 5% of all projects—of a comprehensive foreign aid program that includes agriculture, public facilities, infrastructure, and industry (Information Office of the State Council, 2011). Still, given the visibility of and meaningfulness attached to sports facilities (Kellison & Mondello, 2012). China has been able to leverage its support of stadium construction abroad for a number of benefits. While at least part of China's international stadium policy aims to grow its national economy (e.g., through revenues generated by loan and interest repayment), it has also facilitated the formation of diplomatic ties with strategic allies. For example, stadium partnerships with states rich in natural resources, such as Ecuador and Angola, have improved China's access to oil (Guest, 2009). Chinese stadium diplomacy has also been used to raise the state's profile against its competitors. At a time when the United States has cut its foreign aid program significantly, China has increased spending in Latin America and the Caribbean (Will, 2012). Stadium diplomacy has also been used as leverage in China–Taiwan relations. For instance, after cutting diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Costa Rica received over US\$800 million in bonds and loans from China (Wilson, 2014).

In this chapter, we chronicle China's use of sport as a tool of geopolitical strategy. First, we provide background on China's general foreign aid policies, including its origins and forms. Next, we explore several examples of China's outward stadium investments, including developments in Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, and the South Pacific. We conclude the chapter by considering the possible reasons that underlie China's financial and economic support of stadium development overseas. As introduced in the section below, these motives may be at odds with China's official no-strings-attached policy.

CHINA'S FOREIGN AID AT LARGE

As one of the fastest growing economies worldwide, China has grown its international presence significantly over the past two decades, due in part to the government's relaxed oversight of outward direct investment (Wang, Mao, & Gou, 2014). While its foreign aid program has been criticized for a lack of transparency, China's central information office has outlined several forms of foreign assistance, including complete projects focusing on infrastructure and agriculture (the category likely representing sports stadiums), goods and materials, technical expertise, human resources development, medical assistance, volunteers and volunteer programs, humanitarian aid, and debt relief (Bräutigam, 2011; Grimm, 2011; Information Office of the State Council, 2014).

More broadly, China's foreign aid program aims to "improve people's livelihood" (i.e., by promoting agricultural development, improving education, enhancing medical and health services, building public welfare facilities, and providing humanitarian aid) and "promote economic and social development" (i.e., by improving infrastructure, strengthening capacity building, promoting trade partnerships, and bolstering environmental protection; Information Office of the State Council, 2014, p. 1). The aid packages themselves may include grants, loans (ranging from interest-free to those of low- or high-interest), lines of credit, and in-kind gifts or services (Bernal, 2015). Based on reports provided by the Chinese government, the majority of its foreign assistance (about 56%) is in the form of concessional loans, which are typically marked by below-market interest rates and/or extended grace periods (Information Office of the State Council, 2014; International Monetary Fund, 2014). Grants (36%) and interest-free loans (8%) represent the remaining pieces of China's foreign aid allocations.

Beijing's official position on its foreign aid program depicts a policy that supports collaborative partnership rather than *quid pro quo* trade:

When providing foreign assistance, China adheres to the principles of not imposing any political conditions, not interfering in the internal affairs of the recipient countries, and fully respecting their right to independently choosing their own paths and models of development. The basic principles China upholds in providing foreign assistance are mutual respect, equality, keeping promises, mutual benefits, and win-win agreements. (Information Office of the State Council, 2014, p. 1)

On the other hand, critical analyses of China's foreign aid policies have—like critiques of other state's outward aid—speculated about its underlying intent, especially in cases of extremely generous economic gifting to developing states and emerging economies in Africa, South America, and the Caribbean. As noted by Bräutigam (2011), "critics generally believe that China's aid program is enormous and focused primarily on propping up pariah regimes or smoothing the way to Chinese companies to gain access to resources" (p. 753). As noted in Bernal's (2015) assessment of China–Caribbean partnerships, these foreign aid programs are likely a messy combination of several strategies: "The economic interaction... cannot be explained entirely by economic factors, but is best understood as an economic relationship embedded within a political and diplomatic relationship" (p. 1411). These myriad factors will be discussed further in a later section of this chapter.

A foundational aspect of China's international diplomacy centers on its longstanding conflict with Taiwan (i.e., cross-Straits relations). For example, throughout the process of allying with Caribbean nation-states, "China has been cognizant of its diplomatic rivalry with Taiwan" (Bernal, 2015, p. 1412). A suspected reason for China's historic interest in the Caribbean basin is the fact that a large number of states in this region share diplomatic relations with Taiwan, a direct violation of Beijing's "One China policy" (Alexander, 2011). Under this policy, China and Taiwan cannot be recognized as two separate states, leaving

governments to choose between the People's Republic of China (China) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). The tension in cross-strait relations dates back to the Chinese Revolution of 1949, when mainland China was claimed by the Communist China Party, leaving Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) to retreat to Taiwan (Office of the Historian, 2015). The importing of Chinese goods has grown worldwide, even in states that have not adopted a One China policy. Still, those states that have allied with China (either always or by breaking ties with Taiwan) have enjoyed greater economic cooperation and aid from Beijing, as illustrated in the next section.

STADIUM DIPLOMACY IN PRACTICE

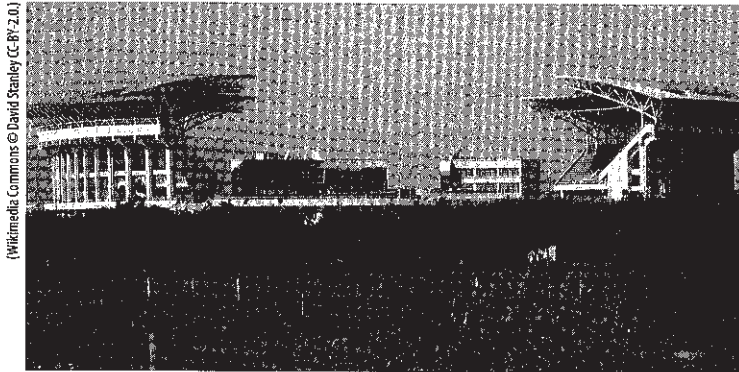
A number of examples illustrate China's efforts to foster diplomatic and strategic alliances with other nation-states, including Tanzania (Amaan Stadium), Angola (Estádio 11 de Novembro, Estádio Nacional do Chiazzi, Ombaka National Stadium, and Tundavala National Stadium), Jamaica (Sligoville Stadium), Antigua and Barbuda (Sir Vivian Richards Stadium), Costa Rica (National Stadium), Kiribati (Betia Sports Complex), and Laos (Lao National Stadium). These prominent Chinese-sponsored sports facilities are highlighted in turn below.

TANZANIA

The first foreign stadium construction project completed by the Chinese government was Amaan Stadium, a 15,000-seat venue constructed in 1970 in Zanzibar (Ross, 2014). Amaan Stadium has primarily been used to host football matches. Major renovations in 2010 allowed the stadium to host these matches during the day as well as under floodlights (Juma, 2013). The Chinese government provided ¥ 48 million (about US \$7.5 million) for the renovations, which represented the stadium's first major overhaul since its opening ("Kudos to Karume," 2010; "SMZ to Protect Amaan Stadium," 2010). According to an editorial published in Tanzania's *Guardian*, these renovations were meant to reflect the continuing friendship between the two states ("Kudos to Karume," 2010). As further gestures of amity, the Chinese government donated a primary school to Zanzibar and provided anti-malaria drugs (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Republic of Tanzania, 2010). In addition to these existing projects, the Chinese government has committed more than US \$70 million toward the construction of a second terminal at Abeid Amani Karume International Airport near Zanzibar City.

ANGOLA

Shifting over to the west coast of Africa, Angola has also benefitted from China's stadium diplomacy. Angola received four different football stadiums in 2009 in order for the state to host the 2010 Africa Cup of Nations (Coupe d'Afrique des Nations [CAN]; Caculo, 2009). These stadiums—Estádio 11 de Novembro, Estádio Nacional do Chiazzi, Ombaka National Stadium, and Tundavala National Stadium—hosted much of the tournament and continue



Ombaka National Stadium in Angola.

to host matches today. Total costs were estimated to be about US \$600 million (Will, 2012), which was financed by the Chinese government (Alm, 2012; Guest, 2009).

Estádio 11 de Novembro, the largest of the four stadiums, is located in Angola's capital city, Luanda. The stadium was named to honor Angola's Independence Day (Africa Ranking, 2015). The 50,000-seat stadium cost US \$227 million and opened in 2009 (Alm, 2012). The stadium boasts two levels of seating, four VIP areas, 40 press boxes, two press rooms, accessible seating, and other modern amenities (Caculo, 2009). As the tournament's primary venue, Estádio 11 de Novembro hosted nine matches of the 2010 CAN, including five Group A, one Group B, one quarterfinal, one semifinal, and the final (World Public Library, 2015). Currently, the stadium is primarily used to host the Primerio de Agosto and Petro de Luanda football clubs as well as international matches (Buzz Nígeria, 2015), but has been reported as showing signs of decline and deterioration (Will, 2012). Beyond hosting CAN, the construction of Estádio 11 de Novembro resonated with many local residents, who praised the addition of the stadium due to its effect on area development including infrastructure upgrades such as roads, piped water extensions, and electricity (Caculo, 2009).

Estádio Nacional do Chiazí, Ombaka National Stadium, and Tundavala National Stadium are noticeably smaller than Estádio 11 de Novembro but still held important roles in the 2010 CAN. Estádio Nacional do Chiazí, located in Cabinda, seats 20,000 including 204 VIP seats and 100 press seats. This stadium cost US \$86 million (Alm, 2012). After hosting the 2010 CAN, FC de Cabinda made Estádio Nacional do Chiazí their home as the tenant team. With 35,000 seats, Ombaka National Stadium was the second largest stadium constructed for the 2010 CAN. Built with an unequal mix of Chinese and Angolan workers (BBC, 2009), Ombaka National Stadium cost US \$118 million to build. Located in Benguela, it is now mostly used for football matches (Buzz Nígeria, 2015). Finally, Tundavala National Stadium, located in Lubango, has a capacity of 20,000 and cost US \$70 million (Alm, 2012).

JAMAICA

China's stadium diplomacy has also extended to the Caribbean. At the time of China's first venture there, the Caribbean was home to four of the 24 nation-states having diplomatic relations with Taiwan (discussed further in a later section). One example of China's stadium

diplomacy in the Caribbean exists in Jamaica. Sligoville Stadium, named for the community in which it is located, is a multipurpose “mini-stadium” consisting of a 600-seat basketball and netball court, a 1,200-seat cricket oval, a 1,500-seat football pitch, and a 400-meter track (Brown, 2013). The Chinese government helped the Jamaican government design and construct the US \$248-million complex after officials were approached by Jamaica’s Minister of Foreign Affairs (Brown, 2013; Du, 2006). During the stadium’s groundbreaking ceremony in 2006, China’s Ambassador to Jamaica proclaimed that the facility was “not only a cooperative project between China and Jamaica, but also a good indication of the genuine friendship and sound relationship between the two countries” (Du, 2006, para. 5).

The venue was completed in 2007, but it went largely unutilized (Henry, 2013). A report from the *Jamaica Observer* described the stadium’s deterioration:

The chain-link fence enclosing the stadium is almost gone, having rotted away over the years. The plastic seats in the stands have crystallized, the majority of them completely destroyed. The bulbs and the casings for the floodlights on the court and the field are all broken. The goal nets are torn up, and the ankle-high grass acts as a deterrent even for those residents who might be inclined to hang out there. The gates, which were once locked to restrict unauthorized access, no longer serve that purpose as the fencing is also gone. While the facility still has electricity, there is no longer a caretaker to do regular landscaping of the venue. (Brown, 2013, para. 4)

The Chinese company that built the stadium expressed concern about its condition, leading them to question whether their resources were wasted on the development (Brown, 2013). In response, the Jamaican government recently planned to incorporate the Sligoville complex into the physical and programmatic structure at GC Foster College, a physical education and sport institute (Henry, 2013).

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

A second example of China’s stadium diplomacy in the Caribbean exists in Antigua and Barbuda. The relationship between the two states stems from the 1980s, when Antigua and Barbuda became the first Caribbean nation–state to officially recognize China (Sheringham, 2007). The Chinese government built Sir Vivian Richards Stadium primarily for the 2007 Cricket World Cup hosted by Antigua and Barbuda. Sir Vivian Richards Stadium cost US \$60 million and seats 10,000 fans (Williamson, 2015). The stadium was built after the Antiguan and Barbudan government contacted Beijing, who ultimately gifted Sir Vivian Richards Stadium to the state after a negotiation period (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Antigua and Barbuda, 2011). After hosting the Cricket World Cup, the stadium continued to be used for cricket, with the Antigua and Barbuda and Leeward Islands cricket teams serving as the stadium’s chief tenants (Williamson, 2015). The stadium has two main stands for spectators, a practice area, a new beach, training infrastructure, and a media

center ("Sir Vivian Richards Stadium," 2007). Like other stadium projects supported by China, news accounts provided by the Chinese government and their diplomatic embassy have hailed Sir Vivian Richards Stadium for its contribution to the economic and infrastructural development of Antigua and Barbuda (e.g., Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Antigua and Barbuda, 2011).

COSTA RICA

Beyond the Caribbean, China's reach has also extended into Central America. Like the Caribbean, Central America is also an important area of diplomatic development for China, due in part to the number of states that provide diplomatic recognition of Taiwan (Will, 2012). Costa Rica and China forged a partnership with the construction of Estadio Nacional de Costa Rica (National Stadium), located in the capital city of San José. National Stadium opened in March 2011 and is Central America's first modern sport and event arena, replacing the old National Stadium, which was constructed in 1924 and torn down in 2008 (Williams, 2011a). The stadium seats 35,000 and has two jumbo screens including one 140-meter HD screen (Rodríguez, 2010), three decks of seating, office space, a sports museum, a hotel, and a banquet hall (Williams, 2011b). National Stadium is home to Costa Rica's national football team and also includes offices for 32 sport federations (Leandro, 2009). The stadium has hosted a number of concerts and major sporting events such as Pearl Jam, Shakira, Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony, the Jonas Brothers, Miley Cyrus, Megadeth, and friendly matches between Costa Rica's national team and Argentina, Brazil, and Spain (Williams, 2011b).

Cross-Strait instability was also an impetus to the development of National Stadium. In 2007, Costa Rica's then-President Óscar Arias severed ties with Taiwan in order to establish a partnership with China (Williams, 2011a). Next, San José Mayor Johnny Araya reached out directly to Beijing's mayor to request funding for National Stadium and to promote engagement between the two nation-states (Will, 2012). The Chinese government gifted the state "a token of appreciation" with the construction of a new National Stadium, spending about US\$100 million on the project (Williams, 2011a, para. 5). Eight hundred Chinese workers were sent to Costa Rica to work shifts 24 hours a day in order to complete the project (Leandro, 2008).

Since National Stadium's opening, China has purchased patrol cars for the national police, provided credit for fixing up an oil refinery, bought US \$300 million in bonds, and established a US \$400 million loan for public transit and road construction. China also established a Confucius Institute in San José (Wilson, 2014). At the time National Stadium was being constructed, China's former ambassador to Costa Rica stated, "So far, Costa Rica hasn't given anything to China. But we are confident that in the future there will be projects that benefit both countries" (Robertson, 2009, para. 1). Two weeks after National Stadium opened, Costa Rica and China signed a free trade agreement (Davis, 2013). Additionally, with over 45,000 residents and a bustling Chinatown in the heart of San José, Costa Rica is now home to the second largest Chinese population in Central America (Will, 2012).

KIRIBATI

A clear illustration of the extent to which stadium diplomacy has been used as a political tool can be found in the Pacific island nation-state of Kiribati. There, China began construction of the Betio Sports Complex in 2002. This complex was the first national sporting center in Kiribati (Radio Australia, 2012). The US \$5.5 million complex was expected to include basketball courts and a gymnasium capable of seating more than 1,000 spectators (Radio Australia, 2012). In return for the sports complex project, Kiribati cleared the Chinese government to build several satellite tracking stations designed to support China's space program (and, according to some defense analysts, spy on U.S. missile tests; Stratfor, 2003).

In 2003, however, the sports complex project was halted due to a shift in diplomatic relations between Kiribati and China. The change in status was spurred by the discovery that the Chinese ambassador to Kiribati donated money to an organization aligned with the current President Teburoro Tito, which created a major debate around the 2003 presidential election (Stratfor, 2003). Tito won reelection only to lose the presidency a year later after a vote of no confidence. The new president, Anote Tong, who was opposed to China's involvement, established diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In response, China dismantled its tracking stations and discontinued work on the sports complex, signaling its severing of diplomatic ties. The Betio Sports Complex was completed by the Taiwanese government and opened in 2006 (Marshall, 2007).

LAOS

As a final example of China's use of sports developments as a foreign policy strategy, China aided Laos in its endeavor to host the 25th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in 2009. The New Laos National Stadium is a 20,000-seat facility located in Vientiane, the state's capital (McCartan, 2008). The stadium cost US \$100 million and was financed by the China Development Bank (Stuart-Fox, 2009). In order to complete the project, thousands of Chinese workers were brought to Laos "due to the severe shortage of skilled Lao labor" (McCartan, 2008, para. 13). Three Chinese companies were contracted to construct the stadium; in exchange for the stadium, these companies were also given the rights to develop more than 4,000 acres of environmentally sensitive marshland for hotels and residences, shopping, and industry. The broad venture, coined the "New City Development Project," was portrayed as an anchor of the region's growing commercial enterprise (Stuart-Fox, 2009).

Despite China's significant investment in local infrastructure, Laotians expressed concern with the plan. First, locals feared that the New City Development Project's ownership would transform the development into a Chinatown, effectively crowding out Laotians both culturally and economically. Second, the proposed location for the development was in close proximity to Pha That Luang, an historic Buddhist site of national prominence (Stuart-Fox, 2009; Will, 2012). In response to these criticisms, Deputy Prime Minister Pomsavat Lengsavad defended the agreement with China, noting that the New Laos National Stadium and subsequent SEA Games would "showcase the country as a destination for investment and

tourism" (McCartan, 2008, para. 5). Additionally, he attempted to assuage concerns about the New City Development Project by assuring Laotians that real estate would be open to all buyers, including the Lao and Chinese. Ultimately, the development in the That Luang marshes never materialized (Stuart-Fox, 2009).

These aforementioned examples illustrate China's investment in sports programs and infrastructure as a means of geopolitical strategy and international diplomacy. As discussed above, these partnerships were not without controversy, though the rationale for China's partnering with nation-states is relatively apparent. These cases exemplify how states (particularly those with emerging economies) may use sport as a vehicle to catalyze economic development or position themselves on the international stage (Kaplanidou, 2012). Indeed, many of the stadiums featured above were built specifically to host major sporting events such as the SEA Games, the CAN, or the Cricket World Cup. Below, we shift our attention to China's incentives for engaging in stadium diplomacy.

CHINA'S STAKE IN STADIUM DIPLOMACY

Despite Beijing's pronouncement that their grants and aid come without conditions, several examinations of China's foreign stadium projects have suggested that in addition to international diplomacy, Chinese investment has been driven by strategies aimed at growing its economy and strengthening its national defense. For instance, Rachel Will and Elliot Ross's separate reporting describes several different incentives for China's stadium diplomacy, including leverage in cross-strait relations, access to valuable natural resources like oil, economic growth and entry into emerging markets, image-building before a worldwide audience, and the formation of strategic alliances that could prove useful when voting on United Nations resolutions (Ross, 2014; Will, 2011, 2012).

Cross-strait influence is clearly an incentive for China's stadium diplomacy. In the above case studies, China-Taiwan diplomacy was an important consideration in Jamaica and Costa Rica. In Kiribati, the government's diplomatic shift from China to Taiwan resulted in a stadium complex started by the Chinese and completed by the Taiwanese. Today, there have been signs that cross-strait relations may be improving, at least from the perspective of international trade and diplomatic cooperation. The 2008 announcement of a "diplomatic ceasefire" between China and Taiwan has put stadium diplomacy on hold in Latin America (Alexander, 2011; Wilson, 2014). While both sides are far from geopolitical harmony, they have respected the truce when it comes to sports developments. For example, when Taiwan-friendly Honduras considered establishing diplomatic relations with China in 2009, China "demurred in order to keep the peace" (Wilson, 2014, para. 9).

Like other nation-states competing in an international marketplace, China has established strategic partnerships in places rich with valuable resources or economic potential. For example, some oil-rich states, short on resources (both capital and human) to build infrastructure, can obtain loans in exchange for oil and gas rights. These states "pay steep interest rates and give up the rights to their natural resources for years. China has a lock

on close to 90 percent of Ecuador's oil exports, which mostly goes to paying off its loans" (Krauss & Bradsher, 2015, p. 1A).

Other economic incentives include the ability to employ Chinese workers on the projects. The large number of laborers utilized for mega projects often necessitates additional development (e.g., residences, shopping centers, dining) to accommodate the influx of foreign nationals, an example of which was the New City Development Project in Laos. For China, these developments can be economically rewarding, but they can also spur controversy. For example, in Angola, China's leading oil supplier (Chadwick, 2015), more than 40,000 Chinese laborers were used for comprehensive post-war reconstruction; this group represented nearly 90% of the total construction workforce ("Angolan Gangs," 2009). Chinese companies were awarded several key contracts on projects that included roads, airports, government buildings, and the four stadiums used for the 2010 CAN. Tension from the influx of Chinese workers in Angola eventually erupted into violence when Angolan gangs began targeting Chinese companies and workers. Reports of violence against Chinese workers included murders, robberies by gunpoint, beatings, and torture (Obajo Ori, 2009). Despite the pushback, China's partnership with Angola has been called a game-changer; by 2010, Angola was China's largest African trade partner (Power, Mohan, & Tan-Mullins, 2012).

Finally, stadium diplomacy may uniquely help the sponsoring state construct a public image that showcases the goodwill of its humanitarian efforts and the legitimacy of its government. Stadiums and international competitions may uniquely contribute to this branding, given the large audiences often associated with sporting events. Much like China has done by hosting its own major events over the past 10 years (i.e., 2008 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, 2010 World Expo, and 2010 Asian Games), its participation in the highly publicized opening of an ally's national stadium can enhance its image among the host state, the Chinese, and a worldwide audience (Chen, 2012). On the other hand, stadium developments embroiled in controversy may affect both the recipient state and China. For example, similar to the challenges of any urban stadium project, Costa Rica's National Stadium and Antigua's Sir Vivian Richards Stadium have both been criticized for their locations, reflecting the idea that the facilities were poorly planned and hastily constructed. Commenting on National Stadium, former Culture Minister Guido Sáenz called the stadium's location in San José's city center "a catastrophe" (Williams, 2011a, para. 15). Sir Vivian Richards Stadium has been dogged by low attendance, blamed on the facility's distance from the Antiguan and Barbudan capital of St. John's (Williamson, 2015). Finally, China has been criticized for its failure to help maintain its stadium developments post-opening. Similar to the state of Jamaica's Sligoville Stadium, Angola's four CAN stadiums, all still in their infancy, have "slid into a permanent decline" (Will, 2012, p. 43). These problems reinforce the view that China's stadium diplomacy is less about forging local legacies in recipient states and more about its positioning as a world power.

CONCLUSION

China's rise as an economic power may trouble its rivals, not only due to China's influence on international trade and policy, but also because of the harmful effects it could have on the global economy:

The show of financial strength also makes China—and the world—more vulnerable. Long an engine of global growth, China is taking on new risks by exposing itself to shaky political regimes, volatile emerging markets and other economic forces beyond its control. (Krauss & Bradsher, 2015, p. 1A)

Looking ahead, China's robust investments abroad are expected to continue. With an estimated US \$4 trillion in foreign currency reserves, there is little evidence to suggest it will reduce its foreign aid spending (Krauss & Bradsher, 2015). While China's stadium developments have slowed in some regions, they continued to be active throughout Africa. Cape Verde's Estádio Nacional opened in 2014 (backed by a US \$12-million, 20-year loan), while Malawi's 40,000-seat, US \$70-million Bingu National Stadium was completed in 2015 (Escobar & Simões, 2013; Khamula, 2015). China is also building stadiums in Gabon and Ivory Coast for the 2017 and 2021 CAN, respectively (Kazeem, 2015).

Just as China's stadium diplomacy is unlikely to subside, it is unlikely to be adopted as a tool of geopolitical strategy elsewhere. In the past several years, citizens in several democratic states have shown strong opposition to financing sports projects in their own homelands. The recent defeat of multiple Olympic-bid referendums in European cities prompted several mainstream media reporters to question whether mega-events like the World Cup and Olympic and Paralympic Games would ever be held in a democratic state after Brazil (Applebaum, 2014; Chandler, 2014). It is also likely that many nation-states would reject the offer of a sponsoring government to finance a stadium development. In South America, for example, there would be little enthusiasm for an offer of stadium diplomacy. Wilson (2014) explains:

With the notable exception of Paraguay, every country recognizes [China], and all have a tendency to have a nationalistic relationship to sport. Having a foreign country finance a stadium might wound national pride, and wouldn't necessarily change their economic or political fortunes. As it stands, they can pursue trade and investment without the appearance of a bribe, and keep their political and cultural integrity intact. (para. 10)

Of course, it is also worth noting that few economies have the capacity to invest in outward development as heavily as China.

Though a small part of its overall foreign aid spending, China's stadium diplomacy has been an effective geopolitical tool. Increasing influence in cross-Strait relations, the acquisition of valuable oil rights, the forming of strategic partnerships around the world, and

an enhanced public image have all occurred under China's foreign stadium developments. Premised on the expectation that a major sports stadium and the events held within it will stimulate a developing state's economy, governments throughout Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, and the South Pacific have partnered with China to construct sports infrastructure. Critics of these diplomatic unions (some of whom include the recipient state's own citizens) are distrustful of Beijing's portrayal of stadium aid as unconditional, instead claiming the recipient is being exploited for resources, political gain, or economic improvement. All signs suggest that China's already sizable stadium diplomacy program will continue to grow. As demonstrated here, scholars, analysts, and ordinary citizens have characterized this program in contrasting or even contradictory ways: as creating opportunity and as opportunistic, as coming with no strings attached or as based on a quid pro quo, as working toward a cross-Strait truce or as a strategic move toward One China. The continued observation of developments in this area may be the only way to settle these analytic disputes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What examples of other nation-states' foreign aid parallel China's stadium diplomacy?
2. In your view, what motives underlie China's comprehensive foreign aid programs?
3. Should nation-states like the United States or Australia adopt programs similar to China's stadium diplomacy? Why or why not?
4. In your opinion, why do you think China's stadium diplomacy has been successful?
5. How does China's stadium diplomacy reflect on the nature of sports around the world?

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